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ABSTRACT

Schools are experiencing pressure to integrate into school programs the educational concepts that society demands. Other factors affecting educational administration are (1) conflicts over control of schools, (2) lack of confidence in decision-makers, (3) reduction of the separation between policy-making and day-to-day administration through school board involvement in administering schools, and (4) citizen apathy. In the future, education will be characterized by sensible and humane accountability systems that keep the dignity of students in the forefront. Citizens will decide to become involved in those things that affect their lives. The roles of superintendents and principals will be filled by those able to thrive under rather substantial pressures in a management setting. Teachers will update their skills in human relations, pupil control, and teaching methodologies. Finally, the trend for education to move away from school buildings will intensify. (MLF)

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FUTURISM IN AMERICAN EDUCATION

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We are living in an era, for however long its duration, when Alvin Toffler's writings are becoming more and more meaningful. Toffler, writing in "Future Shock," stated that, "In the next three decades millions of ordinary and psychologically normal people will face an abrupt collision with the future." As professional educators and as people concerned about education of our youth, we must learn ourselves to manage change before we can help our youth learn about it and learn to manage it.

It appears to the writer that although many human beings experience change daily, it comes about in subtle ways and can leave one with the impression that nothing has changed. This is the trap that seems to catch many of us as we attempt to measure what is happening today with what happened in our past. We can see many things that relate to the past and there are many positive and good things that appear to be valuable and necessary for society to survive. Fuzziness comes into play, however, when we focus in on each and every happening and try to relate its value to a measuring stick that places it either in a category of "good" or "bad." The mere fact that this process is so difficult and complicated often causes human beings to attempt to simplify the matter and blot out those events that cannot easily be reckoned with or easily placed into a category of positive or negative. Herein lies the struggle in education today and within it the crux of turmoil and uncertainty about the purposes of American education.

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Most adults, with some ease, can reckon with the use of alcohol because it has long been a part of our society and it does not frighten us to think about it in terms of newness. The case of marijuana, however, is a relatively new phenomenon and it creates a great deal of anxiety among some adults because they are coming face to face with its newness. There isn't any easy measuring stick to deal with it and consequently, there is much confusion about whether or not it is a serious or less serious crime or a health hazard to use it. Because of the increasing rate of appearance of new issues, unusual pressures are placed upon the schools to meet the challenge of our times and integrate into school programs the educational concepts that society demands.

Some closer examination of the results of increased demands upon schools shows that new and expanded expectations have clearly been developed on the part of the patrons and society in general. Preschool, driver education, drug and tobacco education, values clarification, human relations education, nutrition education, special education, breakfasts for the elderly, career education, family life education, and the current variety of definitions of basic skills all contribute to making the task of the public schools an impossible one. The scope of these expectations is so broad that those of us who are held accountable stand little chance of success on a broad scale. To complicate the matter even more, nearly every adult has had some experience in public or private school education in the past and many of these adults believe they know the simpler answers to the issues facing education. A major issue coming to the front and center at this time is, "Who will control education?" As educators become more organized through collective bargaining laws, as parents organize into various pressure groups, and as students continue to recognize and gain their rights, we in our country can expect certain conflicts right on the doorstep of the public education scene. These conflicts will place even greater pressures upon professional educators and solutions may unfortunately come in the form of Federal and State control of the local schools. This trend

is very obvious now as a proposed Federal collective bargaining law surfaced this past year. Budget lids and restrictions on local boards of education are leading us more and more toward State controlled schools. If the present trend continues, we are but a few steps away from a State salary schedule for staff. Each year the limited parameters of the budget force school districts into uniformity and lack of flexibility.

The point being made here is that the job of the public schools has become extremely fuzzy. Yet, change is inevitable and the answers do not lie in reducing the educational offerings or the opportunities for students. This would fly in the face of the changing society which provides alternatives, choices, and variety in everything. Progress cannot be held in abeyance while we in education catch up. We must learn to cope with the changes, sort out what is possible, and cause those individuals who hold unreal expectations for us in education to recognize our limitations and permit us to move the schools forward in a creative and flexible manner. We must do this if we are to provide our youth with the myriad of skills required for living in a new world. At the present time it is becoming more clear to the writer that adult society is being dragged screaming into the twenty-first century.

The conclusion offered here is that at the present time, the task of the public school system is basically an impossible one.

A second conclusion that appears obvious to me is the apparent degradation of those who must lead and make decisions in this difficult time. The average tenure for a large city superintendent of schools is just over two years. And it is not necessary to limit your view to the superintendency. City managers, county supervisors, State and local representatives in government, governors, and presidents of the United States are suspect. In some cases there is justification for the lack of trust of the people in decision-makers, but the current wave of lack of confidence in decision-makers all across the country seems to indicate a greater

problem than that of inadequate leadership skills on the leader's part.

The attack on superintendents across the country is even more serious because the entire educational program is affected when turmoil exists at this level of the leadership realm.

A third conclusion that comes to the front, and it may be a result of the national trend in the prior observation, is the current degree of involvement by members of boards of education nationwide in administering the schools. The separation between policy-making and day to day administration is becoming more vague as time passes. This involvement contributes to a rapid changeover of chief executives and ultimately affects the ability of a school system to adapt to the rapidly changing needs of youth and tends to encourage uniformity and standardization of education programs. Unfortunately, this type of consequence comes right at a time when school systems require even more daring and creative educational leaders and teachers. A return to basics is a nice sounding theme and it has its merits, but it can be construed by educator and non-educator alike to signal a decrease or lack of emphasis on those other concepts taught in schools. These latter concepts may in the final analysis, make an even greater contribution to the lives of our youth. This misconstruction is a serious issue and it is one that must be reckoned with in the year ahead.

A fourth conclusion that seems obvious to the writer is that we are passing through a cycle when people are generally lethargic, inactive, negative, critical, and seldom outwardly appreciative of the good things they enjoy. Once this cycle passes, the writer predicts a cleansing period when the now apathetic citizen decides to become involved in those things which affect his/her life. Education certainly falls into this category.

As this cleansing comes about, we will regain confidence in those leaders who must make decisions based upon their training and best judgment. A resurgence, then, of trust and latitude will return to governmental agencies, which will give

us at least a solid chance of meeting the extremely diverse and complex demands placed upon us. Included in these demands will be an even different population of young people who are living in an even more complex society than today. It is not difficult to understand that if this era of cleansing takes too long a period of time to arrive, a new activism will be upon us on the part of the young. It is the kind of activism that came about in the sixties as a result of unresponsive educational environments and repressive educators. The present holding pattern that is emerging is exactly the kind we experienced in the latter fifties when the writer was a student. The danger again now is that we adults who are responsible for the educational environment of students will fall back into searching for simple solutions for the always changing and increasingly complex problems.

The cleansing period that will present itself will bring with it some other important phenomena. The environments within which school systems operate will be political ones. In history the involvement of politics in directing education was practically a void. However, the intensity of the political environment as more and more people become active in community affairs will heighten. Again, this will be uncomfortable for many who never knew such environments, but as people's rights are assured, particularly their right of free speech, we can envision more and more educators doing their part as citizens in the political process. This is obvious now as education associations organize and push for what they believe is right and good for education. To deny this is to defy the future.

A fifth conclusion that is coming into focus nationally is that the concept of accountability is vague, but it will not go away. Not only will we be living with accountability in education, but we will be required to develop a "systems" approach to it. This means a shift from the past in terms of each one doing his or her own thing in the classroom toward each classroom becoming a part of a total educational system. Some system of districtwide goals, instructional objectives,

and criterion evaluation techniques will come into play universally. The challenge will be not in avoiding this inevitable need for accountability, but rather in learning how to manage it so that school environments are humanistic ones and not environments where students are reduced to paper and pencil test scores or other inhumane outcomes. There is a rapid movement under way at this very moment for states to adopt accountability themes. In many cases the accountability theme takes the form of measuring students through standardized testing. Some states have developed quite elaborate schemes for this process. The students in these types of accountability schemes have, it seems to the writer, been reduced to "things" and "scores." In the years ahead it will behoove educators to not hang back and resist accountability, but rather move forward to a leading stance as we develop sensible and humane accountability systems that keep the dignity of students in the forefront.

A sixth conclusion that is becoming more and more apparent is one that is extremely meaningful to the writer. This is the call for individuals who can cope with even greater pressures and even more demanding jobs. The tenure for superintendents will shorten with an average between three to six years nationally. This will mean that only certain types of individuals will desire to serve in this capacity. Moving from one locale to another more often will discourage some from the field. Because of this phenomenon, the average age of superintendents will decrease. Also, chief executives will become more management oriented and surround themselves with the various specialists needed to serve the schools, staff, students and patrons.

High school principal roles will change, too, as collective bargaining hardens the lines between professionals. It is the principal who can see into the future who will survive. As building principals accept that they are middle management, their effectiveness will increase. The changes brought about through the myriad

of pressures upon them will step up demands for them to refine their skills in management. All of this will bring forth a "new breed" superintendent and principal who are able to thrive under rather substantial pressures in a management setting.

Teachers, too, will change in the years ahead. The changing student population and the demands they place upon their teachers will cause an inevitable need for teachers to update their skills in human relations, pupil control, and teaching methodologies. One cannot comprehend totally what the school of the nineties will look like, but the trend for education to move away from school buildings will intensify. Education will move out into the communities with the public school buildings as we know them serving as congregating points. This trend already has become apparent and the requirement that school be something more than the usual classroom setting in a school building will become clear. In larger cities the trend toward student absenteeism has become so great that states and local governments are searching for educational strategies to reach the students in unconventional ways. It is not likely that students who see the local school as unexciting and non-meaningful, will return only because of laws that require their attendance. Large city school systems, in many cases, continued their usual educational patterns and programs and have lost the students. It appears clear to the writer that this is the price we pay for our lack of vision and lack of willingness to move forward in meeting the changing needs of youth.

In summary, the future holds excitement for many and trauma for some. Whether or not we who are responsible for educating our youth can meet the challenges remains to be seen.

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